Aegis

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Aegis

by The_German_Grim_Reaper

Summary

aegis, noun; the shield or breastplate of Athena, or under protection or support

or: several months after their latest sounder and the inclusion of Cassie and Gene into their family, Hannibal and Will are taken by surprise when a half-forgotten enemy threatens their newfound happiness. Mason Verger has taken two of their daughters and they will stop at nothing to get them back- only to discover that the two girls are more than capable of taking care of themselves.

Notes

merry christmas darling

Hannibal wasn't sure what he'd been expecting when he answered the phone. It was from Cassie's number, which would have been a bit surprising if he'd stopped to think about it. The teenager had accepted their lifestyle, but she still preferred to communicate through Abigail or Will before she would talk to Hannibal. As it was, he didn't pause to consider why she might have chosen to dial his number instead of Will's, just excused himself from conversation with a group of old acquaintances and answered the call.

Instead of Cassie's voice on the other end, however, he was met with the sound of muffled sobbing. "Cassie?" he asked immediately, suddenly flooded by a wave of concern. No, the gasping sobs coming from his phone did not quite sound like they belonged to Cassie. In fact… "Gene?" he corrected himself, the concern rising even higher.

There was no response from the girl.

"Are you injured?" Hannibal questioned her, meeting Will's eyes through the crowd and gesturing for him to come over. The sobs came louder, but still there was no reply. Hannibal found himself cursing his thoughtlessness; Gene had a tendency to go nonverbal quite often, especially when she was tense or stressed, and if that was the case now then it would be much more difficult to communicate. "One tap for yes, two taps for no. Can you do that for me?"

There was a brief pause, then a single tap. "Good," Hannibal said just as Will reached his side. "Are you injured?"

Two taps. Hannibal breathed a sigh of relief, but clearly something was wrong, and he needed to figure out what it was. "Are you safe?"

Will was clearly very confused, but he seemed to recognize the urgency of the situation and was now speaking to the girl at the coat check and retrieving their jackets. As soon as he had them, Hannibal grabbed his arm and they began to hurry towards the doors. It was incredibly rude to leave a gala so quickly as this, especially without saying goodbye, but he couldn't bring himself to care. His daughters would always take precedence.

Gene tapped twice to indicate that she was safe. Hannibal nodded, even knowing she couldn't see him. They were outside now, headed in a beeline for the Bentley. "Abigail and Cassie, are *they* injured?" He wasn't sure why Gene would be on the phone if something wasn't terribly wrong.

There was a silence only broken by the still-stifled sobs on the other end of the phone line. "Yes or no, Gene, one tap or two," he reminded her. Still there was silence, and his mind raced through the possibilities. "You don't know?" he guessed.

One tap. "Are they safe?" They had reached the car now and, by unspoken agreement, Will was climbing into the driver's seat while Hannibal remained focused on his phone. This time the response came immediately, a quick two taps that had Hannibal's blood freezing in his veins.

"Are they there with you?"

Two taps.

"Did they leave on their own?"

Another two.

"Someone took them?"

One tap.

"Do you know who it was?"

Another negative.

“Okay. Alright, darling, we’re on our way home right now and we’ll fix this, okay? We’ll get them back. Just stay on the line with me until we get there.”

At that moment, Will’s phone began to ring. He cursed and dug it out, handing it to Hannibal without a word.

“I have to talk to someone else now but I’ll still be on the line with you. Just stay where you are and we’ll be right there,” he assured Gene, waiting for her response before answering the other phone. Once she’d tapped out a yes, Hannibal set his phone down in his lap and answered the call on Will’s. It was from an unknown number, but for some reason it struck Hannibal as oddly familiar.

“Will Graham?” The voice on the other end was quiet, uncertain, but Hannibal recognized it right away.

“Margot,” he replied coolly. “This is really not the best time-”

“*Doctor Lecter.*” Her voice had sharpened now, lowered as though she was afraid of being overheard. “*This is an emergency."*

Hannibal paused only momentarily. “I’m in the midst of a family crisis myself. I don’t suppose you would know anything about that?”

"*Mason found out I’m pregnant,*” she whispered, “*and I think he realized you were the one who gave me the idea. He sent men to your house to get you but-*”

“But I wasn’t home.” Hannibal cut her off, understanding and dread mingling in his stomach. “Your brother has them?”

Although Cassie and Gene had their own apartment in the city- paid for by their absent father, who had come into town for the funeral and then left again only a week and a half later- they spent a lot of time at Hannibal’s. Tonight they had been planning a quiet night in,

joining Abigail for movies and (much to Hannibal's displeasure) microwaveable popcorn. He should have considered that being so close to him might make the girls into targets, but the thought had hardly crossed his mind. With Jack and the FBI out of the way, and with it having been several months since he'd seen Mason Verger, he hadn't felt there were any major threats in their lives. Clearly, he'd been wrong.

"*At Muskrat Farm,*" she confirmed. "*They just got here but it looks like they're being taken to the stables. If I try to interfere…*"

"There'll be no need for that," he promised her, although he wasn't entirely certain of that himself. "We'll take care of it. All I ask is that you don't tell the police when we kill him."

"*I can do that,*" Margot agreed. "*He'll know I called you. He'll be ready for you.*"

"And *we'll* be ready for *him*." With that, Hannibal hung up the phone and turned to Will, who was clutching the steering wheel with a white-knuckled grip.

Margot had been kind enough to give them an alibi when they needed it once before. Hannibal had considered that repayment for his help with the inheritance situation, which meant that as it stood she owed him nothing. He was grateful that she had called to warn him anyway.

"Mason Verger kidnapped them?" Will questioned him tensely. "Why?"

"He's upset about Margot's pregnancy," Hannibal explained, picking up his own phone to check on Gene. He had suggested an heir as a solution to Margot's problems and she had leapt at the chance to secure her inheritance, first propositioning Will and then someone else when he had refused. "He took them as a way to harm me."

"Shit," he said succinctly. "Are we still going to the house?"

Hannibal shook his head. "Muskrat Farm. I'll speak to Gene and let her know the change of plans."

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They were only a few minutes from the farm when Will's phone rang again. Hannibal, seeing that it was from Margot, answered it immediately but did not speak. He didn't want to take any chances if it was Mason on the other end.

"*Will?*" This time, it was Cassie's voice that reached his ears. She sounded upset, but he still breathed a sigh of relief at the confirmation that she was still alive.

"It's me," Hannibal told her. "Where are you?" He knew they had been at Muskrat Farm, of course, but it was possible that Mason had moved them either to another building or off the farm entirely. And if he was listening in on the phone call, as was very likely, it wouldn't do to give away that Hannibal knew who had them.

"*Th- the stables. Margot said she talked to you…*"

"Margot is with you?" he questioned sharply. If that was true, there were three people in danger instead of two. "Can you tell me how many men are there?"

There was a sniffle on the other end of the line. "*None.*" Hannibal's brows furrowed, but before he had a chance to speak, Cassie continued. "*Or, well, Mason is here but I stabbed him. Margot is keeping everybody else away… she said I shouldn't do anything until you get here.*"

Every muscle in Hannibal's body was tense, wired for a fight. Cassie sounded moments away from breaking down entirely. "Is he alive?"

"*I- yeah. He's still awake, I don't-*" She cut herself off with a sob.

“We’re almost there,” Hannibal promised her. That was true; they were now pulling into Muskrat Farm’s driveway, his eyes scanning the landscape for Mason’s men as Will drove them towards the barn. “Are you hurt? Or Abigail?"

“*No, we’re fine.*” A pause. “*Is Gene…?*”

“She’s fine,” Hannibal assured her. “She’s still at the house, she hid when she heard the men coming.” Will put the car in park just to the back of the stables. Hannibal was leaping out almost before the car had stopped, Will only a few steps behind him.

He hung up the phone as he pushed the stable doors open. They swung inwards easily and he was immediately hit with the stench of horse manure and blood. Mason lay sprawled out in the center of the floor, blood dripping from his face, as he struggled to regain his footing. Cassie and Abigail stood against the back wall.

Cassie was clutching a bloody knife in one hand and Margot’s phone in the other. She dropped the phone when she saw Hannibal, practically collapsing onto the wall behind her with relief. “Oh, thank god. He’s bleeding so much and I don’t know if I’m supposed to help him or kill him or-”

Hannibal knelt beside Mason’s struggling body, gripping the man’s head tightly as he examined the wound. Beside him, Will hurried over to check on the girls. “You’ve cut him all the way up to the medial pterygoid,” Hannibal said, prodding at the loose piece of flesh with a terrible fascination. The flesh had been severed at the base of his chin and cut nearly all the way up his cheek, dangling limply from his face by what could only be a few centimeters of muscle. It was a brutal wound.

“I have no idea what that means,” Cassie admitted freely from where she and Abigail were now wrapped in Will’s arms.

“It means he’s going to live,” Hannibal told her, “so long as he gets to a competent doctor in the next hour or so. Of course, I’m not particularly inclined to help with that."

“How did you get the jump on him?” Will asked. Hannibal looked up at this, also very interested to hear the answer.

Cassie just shook her head, burrowing further into Will’s embrace. It was Abigail who spoke.

“He let her go,” she said hoarsely. “He gave her the knife and told her if she could make it off the property, she’d get to live.”

“And you attacked him instead?” Hannibal questioned, directing his words at Cassie. She nodded tearfully in Will’s arms.

“I knew I’d never make it out, so I- and I was just so *angry*- he wasn’t expecting me to lash out, I think, and I caught him off guard.”

“Margot must have heard him scream,” Abigail added, rubbing soothing circles on her girlfriend’s back as she, too, huddled in close to Will’s embrace. “She sent away the men who were guarding the doors and told us to call you.”

Hannibal paused, glancing from Cassie’s face to Will’s in consternation. He would have expected such a violent response from Abigail, of course- she was a hunter by nature, just like himself- but he had never anticipated that it would be Cassie who ended up with blood on her hands. “I can save him,” he offered. By this point, the injured man had slipped into unconsciousness, still bleeding profusely on the stable floor. “If we leave now, he will die. But if you don’t want his death on your head, I can save him.”

It was not an offer he made lightly. He had, in the past, specifically orchestrated events to put blood on other people’s hands, to make them indebted to him, and now he was doing the opposite. But although he was not particularly close with Cassie, he *did* consider her a part of their family, and he found that living with Will had tempered his cruel edges slightly. He didn’t want her to suffer with the guilt.

Cassie hesitated, then shook her head. “I don’t- he deserves this. I wish I hadn’t been the one to do it, but he deserves to die. Can- can we just go home now? I need to wash this blood off and check on Gene and…”

She trailed off as Abigail let go of her, striding forward to where Hannibal was still kneeling beside Mason's body. She was a small girl, but Mason wasn't exactly a large man, and she lifted him up by the shoulders with only a small grunt of effort. Hannibal watched with pride as she dragged him a few steps over to the wall of the stables with no consideration for his comfort. She bashed his head against the lock on one of the stalls once, twice, and then a third time before letting go, breathing heavily as he dropped to the ground at her feet. Cassie was staring at her with wide eyes.

"There," Abigail said, "now you're not the one who killed him."

"A tragic accident," Hannibal surmised with a pleased twitch of his lips. "Tripped and hit his head on the door. Margot should really look into replacing these locks; old metal can be quite sharp if one hits it at the wrong angle."

It wasn't a particularly convincing story, but it was plausible and that was all he needed. Mason was not a well-liked man and, with Hannibal's and Margot's money, the medical examiner would be quick to corroborate their story. With an accidental death, there would be no need to even look into phone records that might incriminate Hannibal or others.

"Should we talk to Margot before we go?" Will asked, leading a still-shaken Cassie towards the exit.

"No need," Hannibal assured him. "She let me know some days ago that the baby was confirmed to be male, so there will be no issues with the inheritance. I'll call her tonight and go over the details of our story."

"What about the men who brought us here?" Cassie wondered. "Won't they say something, or…?"

"They cannot speak up without incriminating themselves, not that they would have reason to. Margot holds the power, so they'll answer to her now."

Cassie nodded, accepting that, as they left the stables. Only her hands- and now Abigail's- were covered in blood, so they left no trail behind them as they hurried back to the car. This had been an unexpected development, and one that had worried Hannibal far beyond what he'd thought possible. He would have to look into getting Cassie some therapy- Bedelia could probably be pressured into doing it if Cassie didn't feel comfortable talking with Hannibal himself- but for now they were safe and that was all that mattered.

And, well, if he smiled as he saw the knife still clutched tightly in Cassie's white-knuckled grip, that was no one's business but his own.

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